

SUCCESS STORY

New hope for a better future to people with HIV in Kiziba refugee camp



For one year, Speciose Mukakarori used to leave home at 3 am to get to the nearest hospital by 7 am to receive the anti-retroviral therapy (ART). Speciose preferred to walk despite the long distance – rather than getting a ride on a transport provided for refugees on ART -- to avoid being implicated as a “passenger on the HIV car.” The counseling that Speciose receives as part of ART helped her to overcome the unease with being HIV positive. She now gives testimonies about her HIV experience.

The availability of the anti-retroviral therapy (ART) directly in the refugee camp helps to combat stigma and discrimination previously faced by those on ART, as well as helps to ensure proper adherence to medication, providing new hope for a better future to people living with HIV in Kiziba Camp

Telling Our Story
USAID/Rwanda

Kiziba refugee camp, located in the western Province of Rwanda, is home to nearly 18,000 Congolese refugees that have fled violence from the rebel and militia fighting in Democratic Republic of Congo. Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA), as an implementing partner to UNHCR actively engaged on Care and Treatment in Kiziba camp, is one of the three refugee camps in Rwanda that receive comprehensive HIV and AIDS health care services through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The other two camps, Gihembe and Nyabeheke, are supported by the American Refugee Committee.

Prior to initiating anti-retroviral therapy (ART) services at the camp, people with HIV living in the camp and the surrounding community had to go to a hospital in the nearest town of Kibuye, which is 15 kilometers away from the camp for initial appointments to commence ART, medication distribution, follow-up care, and CD4 counts. In an attempt to facilitate access to treatment for these people, AHA organized transport of ARV patients to the hospital a few times in a week. However, transporting patients did not help to get the intended outcome. The ART adherence did not improve because the patients feared being easily identified when getting in the ambulance on assigned days of the week.

With PEPFAR support and site accreditation by the Rwandan Ministry of Health, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in partnership with AHA initiated an ART program at Kiziba camp in March 2008. The ARV is integrated in the full health service package that is offered to refugees as well as to surrounding local community. The Kiziba ART site has 78 registered people living with AIDS for which a close monitoring is done, among them 44 are receiving the life-saving treatment. These include 29 refugees and 15 individuals from the local surrounding community.

The availability of the ART for the vulnerable population of refugees directly in the camp helps to combat stigma and discrimination previously faced by those on ART, as well as helps to ensure proper adherence to medication, providing new hope for a better future to people living with HIV in Kiziba Camp. Beginning September 2008, Gihembe camp is also able to provide ART to its population on the site.

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